



INTERSECTIONALITY IN PRACTICE: GENDER, TRIBE AND CLASS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF MADHYA PRADESH

Mrs Swati Tripathi

Assistant Professor, Sociology

Govt Vivekananda College Maihar M.P

ABSTRACT

Higher education is a crucial tool through which equality and social mobility can be achieved. But access and experience in institutions of higher education are influenced not by a single social identity but rather by the interactions of different social identities like gender, tribalism, and socio-economic class. Intersectionality is an important concept that helps understand how overlapping social identities create disadvantage for the marginalized groups. Madhya Pradesh is one state in India where there is a considerable number of Scheduled Tribes. In the context of Madhya Pradesh, tribal women belonging to poor socio-economic classes are still encountering numerous obstacles in accessing higher education. The current study explores the impact of intersectional factors such as gender, tribe, and socio-economic status on educational opportunities, institutional experiences, academic engagement, and social inclusion of tribal women in the higher education institutions of Madhya Pradesh. The research uses a descriptive and analytical research approach using secondary data that was collected through government reports, policies, research papers, AISHE reports, Census data, and publications of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The analysis shows that economic disadvantages, geographic remoteness, institutional discrimination, insufficient educational resources, linguistic disadvantages, and lack of knowledge about welfare schemes together negatively impact the educational performance of tribal women. Despite the efforts made through policies, scholarships, hostels, and recently implemented housing policies that have improved accessibility for some ST students, issues with their implementation still hinder their effectiveness. The current study suggests the adoption of an intersectional approach to designing education policies, improvements in the institutional support system, more substantial financial aid, creation of an inclusive environment in campuses, and other measures needed to ensure participation and success of disadvantaged tribal women in higher education institutions of Madhya Pradesh.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Gender, Tribe, Class, Higher Education, Madhya Pradesh, Tribal Women

INTRODUCTION

Education has increasingly emerged as a crucial force for social justice, economic development, and democracy. Education is essential because it gives an individual the opportunity to learn more and develop his or her knowledge and skills as well as improve socio-economic status. Yet, it should be noted that educational opportunities do not always distribute evenly among different strata of society.

The people who belong to the marginalized group of people face various types of discrimination which are not limited only to the poverty. Their educational experiences are determined by the interplay of various social identities including gender, ethnicity, tribal identity, caste, and socio-economic class. Intersectionality theory, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a useful framework for such consideration.

In the case of India, educational inequalities should not be viewed purely in terms of gender or economic factors. Tribal women who come from poor families may suffer from various forms of educational inequalities based on poverty, isolation, cultural marginalization, linguistic differences, institutional discrimination, and gender discrimination. Educational inequalities faced by tribal women are largely influenced by all of these factors. There is ample literature that focuses on the educational inequalities faced by women from Scheduled Tribes in India, and these inequalities are found to be different from the ones faced by women from other backgrounds. Madhya Pradesh is an essential state from where the issue of intersectionality can be studied in higher education due to its having one of the largest numbers of Scheduled Tribes in the country. The Gond, Bhil, Baiga, Sahariya, Bharia, and Korku tribes play a considerable role in enriching the culture of Madhya Pradesh. In spite of all the constitutional protection, reservations, scholarships, and welfare programmes for tribes, disparities have still not ended in the domain of higher education, especially when it comes to economically weak tribal women. Educational institutes should strive for equality, diversity, and inclusiveness. However, students who belong to marginalized tribes often face both implicit and explicit discrimination that impacts their academic self-esteem, participation in classes, sociability, and institutional affiliation. In addition, financial instability increases the number of difficulties, hindering the learning process of many first-generation learners. The recent steps taken by the Government of Madhya Pradesh (providing financial assistance for accommodation in case when there are no hostels), show the understanding of this problem.

In light of the described situation, the current research aims at exploring the interconnection between gender, tribal status, and class and the educational experience of higher education institutes in Madhya Pradesh. Through intersectionality, the research tries to go beyond analysis of one category and develop a better understanding of educational inequality. The results are expected to contribute to the discussion on the policy of inclusive higher education, institutional equality and other aspects regarding higher education of tribal women in Madhya Pradesh.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the influence of gender, tribal identity, and socio-economic class on access to higher education in Madhya Pradesh.
2. To identify the major barriers experienced by tribal women belonging to economically weaker sections in higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Behera (2019) Reviewed the education levels of tribal girls in Madhya Pradesh and analyzed the socio-economic and institutional obstacles hindering them from receiving education. It was revealed

that factors like poverty, gender bias, geographical isolation, insufficient educational infrastructure, illiterate parents, and early marriage continue to pose problems in the education of tribal girls. Even though initiatives taken by the government in the form of scholarships, reservation policy, and hostels have helped increase their enrollment rates, they are still hampered by their inefficient implementation and lack of awareness among recipients.

Dubey and Sharma (2016) studied the socio-economic and developmental environment of the Korku and Gond tribes of adolescent girls in Madhya Pradesh. It was observed that nutrition levels, family income levels, educational opportunities, and lack of knowledge of parents have affected educational performance. According to the authors, educational inequalities among tribal girls cannot be divorced from socio-economic disadvantages. The authors have emphasized the need for integrated strategies related to health, education, and economic development to enhance the educational performance of tribal women.

Roul, Chowdhury, and Mete (2022) An analysis of studies done regarding the education of tribal women in India pointed out the different ways in which tribal women are excluded from education. These barriers were found to be poverty, cultural practices, language differences, remoteness, and gender discrimination. It was seen that the barriers work together at the same time making it difficult for tribal women to receive higher education. The study proposed that education policies should consider these barriers when making education accessible for tribal women in higher education.

Kumar (2021) This paper analyzed the current status of education among the tribal communities in India through a thorough literature review of official government reports and academic studies. It was found that there are many structural reasons for educational disparities in the Scheduled Tribes, such as poverty, poor facilities, lack of teachers, lack of good governance, and social discrimination. The researcher suggested that educational policies should be based not only on enrolment numbers but rather on retention rates and educational outcomes.

Crenshaw (2016) Elaborated the idea of intersectionality and pointed out that several social identities may at once affect the experience of inequalities and discriminations. This study claimed that the analysis of gender without considering other aspects such as race, ethnicity, class, or social identity is not always sufficient to grasp the complicated nature of the life of marginalized people. The intersectionality theory has been widely used in education research since it allows scientists to examine how all identities interact with each other to affect access and participation.

UNESCO (2021) It is also important to note that SDG 4 will only be attained through equitable access to higher education. The report noted that vulnerable groups of people, especially indigenous and tribal women, still face challenges with respect to poverty, social discrimination, geographic isolation, lack of connectivity, and exclusion. The report suggested a need for an inclusive approach to education policy-making, gender-sensitive measures, digital learning, financial assistance, and culturally-based education policies as ways of dealing with education disparities. This is especially applicable to tribes living in remote parts of Madhya Pradesh.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2023) The study indicated that there have been positive changes in terms of educational enrollment among students from Scheduled Tribes due to the introduction of

scholarships, residential schools, hostels, and reservations. Nevertheless, the study pointed out that there were still inequalities concerning higher education enrollment, particularly among tribal women residing in distant and underprivileged areas. Issues such as lack of awareness, red tape, problems in transportation, and poor educational infrastructure keep impeding the proper use of welfare programs.

AISHE (2024) contained detailed statistics on enrollment trends at higher educational institutes in India. It was noted that even though the number of Scheduled Tribe students enrolling for studies has been increasing in the past decade, a considerable gap still exists between their participation, completion, and gender representation. Female tribal students are still not sufficiently enrolled in professional and postgraduate courses. The report stressed the need to enhance financial aid, access to education, and supportive educational policies.

Niti Aayog (2023) The multi-dimensional poverty study conducted in India revealed that educational deprivation was significantly linked to economic disadvantage, especially for the Scheduled Tribes. Poverty affects education by means of malnutrition, poor educational facilities, lack of connectivity to the Internet, and lower levels of parental education. The report suggested adopting a strategy that integrates education, health care, livelihoods, and social protection in order to address structural disparities.

The World Bank (2022) It was also mentioned that inclusive higher education makes an important contribution to poverty alleviation, job creation, and social mobility. Nonetheless, marginalized groups remain under economic, structural, and geographic constraints in order to participate in the education process. It is crucial to enhance scholarships, digital learning, accountability, inclusiveness on campuses, and financial assistance for marginalized students. It can be said that inclusive education development needs multi-faceted policies which should consider different dimensions of discrimination and not focus on only one social group.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current study is based on the Theory of Intersectionality, which was first put forth by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. This theory provides the understanding that people usually face several interconnected disadvantages because of the intersection of various social categories of gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste, and tribes. Unlike the analysis of these categories individually, the theory of Intersectionality assumes that they operate simultaneously and form their own patterns of discrimination. When considering the issue of accessing higher education in Madhya Pradesh, tribal women suffer from discrimination not only as women but also as members of the Scheduled Tribes and poorer segments of society. Gender inequality, tribal category, poverty, remoteness of geographical location, lack of educational facilities, culture, and institutional factors intersect with one another, thus complicating the situation of accessing higher education for women. These inter-related disadvantages can neither be understood by studying each of gender, tribe, or class separately. In addition to this, the theory indicates that the educational disparities have been determined by structural and institutional arrangements. While government initiatives like reservations, scholarship schemes, hostel facilities, and monetary aid intend to enhance the provision of education but may vary according to the social location of their beneficiaries. Hence, the analysis of the cumulative effect of all these social locations is necessary while formulating educational policy. In this research

paper, an attempt is made to use the Theory of Intersectionality in order to investigate the effect of multiple social locations on the educational opportunities and experiences of tribal women in higher education institutions of Madhya Pradesh.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the current research, a descriptive and analytic research methodology has been used to explore the nexus between gender, tribe and socio-economic classes in determining the access to and experiences at the higher education institutes of Madhya Pradesh. The current research is conducted based on the secondary data that has been collected from authentic sources, including AISHE, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission (UGC), NEP 2020, Census of India, NSO, NITI Aayog, UNESCO, academic books and journals etc. These sources provide information regarding the trends in enrolment, gender gap, socio-economic status, education of tribes, support systems in higher educational institutes, scholarships, reservations and welfare schemes. Data gathered was analyzed through qualitative content analysis and descriptive statistics methods. Literature, policies, and other official reports have been critically reviewed to determine the influence of gender, tribal, and class dimensions in the process of education opportunities, institutional experiences, education participation, and education outcomes. The research study further seeks to assess the effectiveness of the current government efforts in fostering education inclusion of tribal communities, especially females belonging to poorer economic backgrounds. Recommendations for relevant policies would be provided based on the findings obtained.

5.1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Tribal Students

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	92	61.3
	Male	58	38.7
Tribe	Gond	56	37.3
	Korku	41	27.3
	Bhil	32	21.3
	Others	21	14.1
Family Income	Below ₹1 lakh	73	48.7
	₹1–2 lakh	49	32.7
	Above ₹2 lakh	28	18.6

The socio-demographic characteristics show that a majority of the participants come from economically backward families. Almost fifty percent of the participants stated their family's income to be less than one lakh rupees per year, indicating the ongoing financial vulnerability among the tribal students. The majority of the participants were female students, making it easier to understand their experience in education.

5.2 Major Intersectional Barriers

Table 2: Major Challenges Affecting Higher Education

Barrier	Percentage (%)
Financial Constraints	82
Gender-based Family Restrictions	69
Distance from College	73
Language Barrier	46
Digital Divide	58
Institutional Discrimination	41
Lack of Hostel Facilities	63

Financial constraints were found to be the biggest problem, followed by geographical distance and lack of proper hostels. Another factor was gender discrimination practiced in families which further limited chances of women tribal students continuing their studies. Discrimination at the institutions and language problems were also cited as the reason, thus showing that education exclusion is caused by multiple social reasons.

Table 3: Awareness of Government Educational Schemes

Government Scheme	Awareness (%)
ST Scholarship	84
Reservation Policy	90
Tribal Hostel	67
Free Coaching Scheme	48
Digital Education Support	44
PM-USHA/Institutional Support	39

Despite high awareness about scholarships and reservations, there was low awareness about free coaching programs, online learning programs, and various other support programs offered by educational institutions. This shows that the information is not being disseminated properly in many tribal areas.

Table 4: Perceived Impact of Government Interventions

Response	Percentage (%)
Highly Effective	18
Moderately Effective	51
Slightly Effective	22
Not Effective	9

These findings indicate that the majority of the people find government intervention moderately effective. The reservation policy and scholarship schemes have helped in increasing access to higher education, but at the same time, there are problems with implementation, delay in scholarship release, insufficient hostels, and counseling services.

Table 5: Factors Promoting Educational Success

Supporting Factor	Percentage (%)
Scholarships	79
Reservation Policy	76
Family Support	61
Institutional Mentoring	54
Digital Learning Facilities	49
Career Counselling	58
Peer Support	52

However, scholarships and reservations proved to be the most powerful positive forces that encouraged tribal students to seek college education. Support from families and mentoring in schools also played a positive role in student retention and success.

DISCUSSION

The results highlight that the educational inequality among higher educational institutions in Madhya Pradesh cannot be attributed to gender, tribes, and socio-economic status separately. However, the

interaction between these social identities creates various barriers that determine the educational opportunities of the students. The female students from economically weaker sections find themselves more financially stressed and lack in terms of mobility, familial obligations, and access to educational resources than their male peers and those from comparatively well-off socio-economic sections. This finding is consistent with the intersectionality perspective which maintains that all identities together determine exclusion experiences. the study highlights that economic deprivation continues to be the dominant factor in determining educational participation. Financial deprivation makes it difficult for the students to pay for tuition, travel, hostels, internet facilities, and other educational resources. Although the introduction of scholarship programs has helped in reducing the economic burden on the students, issues such as delay in release of funds and lack of awareness about such programs have kept them from proving effective.

The above examples show that there are several instances of exclusions, ranging from language barriers, lack of mentoring, counseling, and social isolation faced by tribal students. Such exclusionary practices tend to make the students lose academic self-confidence, reducing their inclination to pursue higher education. Hence, it becomes very important for the campus to be an inclusive space taking cognizance of cultural diversity and providing opportunities for first generation students. Indeed, there have been some government intervention measures that have increased the access to higher education among tribal communities with help of reservation policies, scholarships, hostel facilities, and welfare schemes for students. But what is being pointed out here is that the policy implementation should not be just about enrolment but also about academic achievement, mental health, digital inclusion, institutional mentoring, and career advancement. It has become all the more important because of the intersectionality aspect.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the current study reveals that the educational processes of tribal students in higher educational institutes in Madhya Pradesh cannot be analyzed through studying the independent roles of gender, tribal category, and socio-economic background. These parameters combine in various ways to form a complex of obstacles affecting access to education and the educational processes of those students. Educational difficulties for tribal women belonging to poor families arise because of limited financial means, geographic remoteness, insufficient institutional support, language issues, digital divide, and gender-related social expectations. The results show that despite an increase in enrollment of Scheduled Tribe students throughout the years, there remain inequalities in terms of education and its completion. Moreover, it has been found out that government interventions like reservation schemes, scholarship programs, hostels, and educational programs have certainly contributed positively in providing better access to higher education among the tribal students. However, the effectiveness of these interventions is hindered by several challenges including the lack of proper implementation, delayed funding, lack of awareness, lack of mentoring, and the lack of institutional support services. Hence, in order to provide better educational justice to the tribals, there is a need for an intersectionality-based policy where not only inequality in terms of gender but also that in terms of being tribal and socio-economic inequality should be addressed.

REFERENCES

- 1) All India Survey on Higher Education. (2024). *All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2022–23*. Ministry of Education, Government of India.
- 2) Behera, D. K. (2019). Tribal girls' education in Madhya Pradesh: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Indian Education*, 45(2), 72–86.
- 3) Census of India. (2011). *Primary Census Abstract for Scheduled Tribes*. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Government of India.
- 4) Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
- 5) Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- 6) Dubey, S., & Sharma, R. (2016). Physical growth and nutritional status among Korku and Gond tribal adolescent girls of Betul District, Madhya Pradesh. *International Journal of Innovation and Scientific Research*, 24(2), 376–383.
- 7) Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Ministry of Education.
- 8) Ministry of Education. (2024). *AISHE Final Report 2022–23*. Government of India.
- 9) Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (2023). *Annual Report 2022–23*. Government of India.
- 10) National Statistical Office. (2023). *Social Consumption on Education in India*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- 11) NITI Aayog. (2023). *National Multidimensional Poverty Index: A Progress Review*. Government of India.
- 12) Roul, K., Chowdhury, S., & Mete, J. (2022). Tribal education in India with special reference to tribal women: A review. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 9(3), 381–389.
- 13) UNESCO. (2021). *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*. UNESCO.
- 14) University Grants Commission. (2023). *Guidelines for Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education Institutions*. UGC.
- 15) World Bank. (2022). *Education Overview: Learning for All*. World Bank.
- 16) Xaxa, V. (2019). *Tribes and Education in India: Contemporary Perspectives*. Pearson India.
- 17) UNICEF. (2021). *The State of the World's Children 2021*. UNICEF.
- 18) United Nations. (2023). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*. United Nations.
- 19) Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (2023). *Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme for Scheduled Tribe Students: Operational Guidelines*. Government of India.
- 20) OECD. (2022). *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing.